

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI  
SOUTHERN DIVISION

REPUBLICAN NATIONAL  
COMMITTEE; MISSISSIPPI  
REPUBLICAN PARTY; JAMES  
PERRY; and MATTHEW LAMB

PLAINTIFFS

VS.

Civil Action No. 1:24-cv-00025-LG-RPM

*JUSTIN WETZEL, in his official  
capacity as the clerk and registrar of the  
Circuit Court of Harrison County; TONI  
JO DIAZ, BECKY PAYNE, BARBARA  
KIMBALL, CHRISTENE BRICE, and  
CAROLYN HANLDER, in their official  
capacities as members of the Harrison  
County Election Commission; and  
MICHAEL WATSON, in his official  
Capacity as the Secretary of State of  
Mississippi*

DEFENDANTS

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**DEFENDANT SECRETARY OF STATE MICHAEL WATSON'S UNOPPOSED MOTION  
TO EXEMPT DEFENDANT FROM FILING ANSWER TO PLAINTIFFS'  
COMPLAINT TO ACCOMMODATE PARTIES' ANTICIPATED FILING  
OF EARLY CROSS-MOTIONS FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT**

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Defendant Michael Watson, in his official capacity as Secretary of State of Mississippi (“Defendant”), pursuant to FED. R. CIV. P. 7, files this his unopposed motion to exempt Defendant from filing an answer or other response to Plaintiffs’ Complaint to accommodate the parties’ anticipated filing of early cross-motions for summary judgment, and in support thereof would show unto the Court the following:

1. On January 26, 2024, Plaintiffs filed their Complaint challenging the legality of MISS. CODE ANN. § 23-15-637(1)(a), a Mississippi Election Code statute governing the deadline for receipt of mail-in absentee ballots, on federal statutory and constitutional grounds.

2. Defendant was served with Plaintiffs' Complaint on February 5, 2024, making Defendant's answer or other response due on or before February 26, 2024.

3. On February 9, 2024, Defendant was served with a Complaint in a related action styled *Libertarian Party of Mississippi v. Wetzel, et al.*, in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi (Southern Division), Civ. Action No. 1:24-cv-000347-LG-RPM. The Complaint in the aforementioned related action was filed against the same defendants named in the instant action and is also pending before this Court.

4. Both the instant action and the above-mentioned related action implicate related questions of law capable of resolution by the Court. Accordingly, and in an effort "to secure the just, speedy, and inexpensive determination" of this action, see FED. R. CIV. P. 1, Plaintiffs and Defendant in the instant action anticipate coordinating with all other named defendants and the plaintiff in the above-mentioned related action to dispose of all claims in both cases via cross-motions for summary judgment to be separately filed in both actions. It is anticipated that the parties will, in the near future, seek to consolidate these cases to allow for a coordinated briefing schedule on the parties' respective cross-motions for summary judgment.

5. To accommodate the foregoing contemplated adjudication of this matter via FED. R. CIV. P. 56, and in lieu of otherwise filing a pre-answer motion to dismiss pursuant to FED. R. CIV. P. 12, Defendant requests that he be exempted from filing an answer or other response to Plaintiffs' Complaint [Dkt. #1] by February 26, 2024, or otherwise, subject to further order of this Court regarding the prospective entry of a briefing schedule on the parties' anticipated cross-motions for summary judgment.

6. In filing this motion, Defendant preserves, and does not waive, any and all defenses to the Complaint filed against him in the instant action and the above-mentioned related action.

7. Counsel for Plaintiffs has advised that the relief sought herein is unopposed.
8. This motion is not interposed for delay or other improper purpose. Given the straightforward nature of the relief sought herein, Defendant requests that the Court waive the requirement of filing a separate memorandum of authorities.

**WHEREFORE, PREMISES CONSIDERED**, Defendant Michael Watson, in his official capacity as Secretary of State of Mississippi, respectfully requests that the Court make and enter its Order exempting him from filing an answer or other response to Plaintiffs' Complaint [Dkt. #1] by February 26, 2024, or otherwise, subject to further order of this Court regarding the prospective entry of a briefing schedule on the parties' anticipated cross-motions for summary judgment.

THIS the 16th day of February, 2024.

Respectfully submitted,

MICHAEL WATSON, IN HIS OFFICIAL  
CAPACITY AS SECRETARY OF STATE OF  
MISSISSIPPI, DEFENDANT

By: LYNN FITCH, ATTORNEY GENERAL  
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

By: s/Rex M. Shannon III  
REX M. SHANNON III (MSB #102974)  
Special Assistant Attorney General

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ATTORNEYS FOR DEFENDANT MICHAEL WATSON, IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS  
SECRETARY OF STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I, Rex M. Shannon III, Special Assistant Attorney General and one of the attorneys for the above-named State Defendant, do hereby certify that I have this date caused to be filed with the Clerk of the Court a true and correct copy of the above and foregoing via the Court's ECF filing system, which sent notification of such filing to all counsel of record.

THIS the 16th day of February, 2024.

s/Rex M. Shannon III  
REX M. SHANNON III